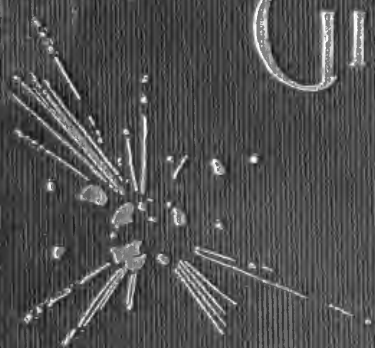


# JOHN GILDART



.. M.E. HENRY-RUFFIN ..



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*M. E. Henry Ruffin.*

# JOHN GILDART

An  
Heroic  
Poem



BY M. E.  
Henry-  
Ruffin



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TO  
MY ALMA MATER  
ST. JOSEPH'S ACADEMY, EMMITSBURG, MARYLAND,  
WITH AN INSPIRING MEMORY  
OF NATURE IN ITS NOBLEST PHASES,  
AND WITH A REVERENTIAL GRATITUDE  
FOR ALL THAT WAS ELEVATING  
IN ITS INFLUENCE, PRECEPT AND EXAMPLE,  
I DEDICATE  
THIS WORK.



## JOHN GILDART.

---

VIRGINIA! Beloved of the mountains! we  
bend

To thy lofty-browed beauty in homage and  
hail.

Superb in the cloudland, all majesty's awe  
On the crown of thy crests shall not fail.

With their blush when the bridegroom sun  
uplifts

With luminous touch, the morning's veil;  
On through the noonglow's throbbing sea,  
When isles of purple shadow sail;

Or flamed with the track of the sunset fire,  
When the drooping torches of twilight trail;  
Or solemnly still for the silver step

Of the gliding moonbeam, pure and pale;

The sunlight's shadow sanctified;

The dead day's spirit purified.







“WHEN UP THE PATH, A HORSE AND RIDERS CAME ; A MOUNTAIN FARMER  
WITH HIS MOUNTAIN BRIDE.”

(See page 6.)

## I.

A mountain way, a russet thread that wound  
Ambitious from the valley's low content,  
To cloud-embarrassed precipice. Midway  
Beside the path, a modest cottage stood  
As though it halted in its white repose,  
Nor higher wished to dare. The sunset flames  
Had faded to the ashes of gray eve,  
When up the path, a horse and riders came :  
A mountain farmer with his mountain  
bride :

The cot their quiet goal. Their steed forgot  
The steep ascent and double burden, when  
He took the air of home into his breath.  
John Gildart gave him rein—happy to feel  
The nearness of his home ; happier still,  
The clasp of two dear hands ; happiest of all,  
That Ruth and home and happiness were his.

Just as the quiet beehive grows aloud,  
With all its buzzing life, at the first crash





Of honey-seekers, at the horseman's tread,  
The cottage broke from stillness into sound,  
Kinsman and friend and neighbor welcoming  
John Gildart and the bride he brought across  
The Carolina border.

To the door,  
Last, slowly tottering, two age-bowed forms,  
And John said gently : "Father, this is  
Ruth!"

And still more gently : "Mother, this is  
Ruth!"

The girl's sweet eyes so sought a welcome in  
Their faces, that the old man's heart, straight-  
way,

Went after John's ; the mother, too, almost  
Forgave her usurpation, when she spoke.  
And then was swept the merry human tide  
Back to the cottage and the feast began :  
The wedding merriment of mountaineers.  
While Ruth sat pondering at the cordial  
board,



Her eyes and thoughts going from face to  
face,

Trying to hide the wonder that they all  
Were unfamiliar ; then remembering who  
Was at her side, she sent her brave, true smile,  
A gentle messenger, unto his friends,  
And won her place among them.

Through the night,  
Upon the silver silence of the hills,  
The little cottage flashed out like a gem,  
With all its gleaming windows to the sky.  
And when the stars went out beyond the  
night,

To call Aurora from behind the heights,  
And bid her bring the morning, one by one  
Left friend and kinsman, for their homes,  
or up,

Or down, or o'er the ceaseless crests. And  
Ruth,

Enthroned by love, with gentle conquest, took  
Possession of the kingdom of her home.



Home coming ! Strange rite that breaks  
and that binds  
One life, in all that in life is the best.  
O faith of a woman ! how fate ever finds  
For her feet a new threshold, her heart, a  
new rest.

Or cottage or palace or peasant or queen,  
She knows, as she greets the strange portals,  
her reign  
Has begun ; her throne mounted ; or  
mighty or mean,  
Love-sceptred, the home is now her domain.

O ! the brave faith that falters not, step-  
ping firm o'er  
Into the new life ; and whether it send  
Sunlight or shadow across the strange  
door,  
The veiled future is met, like the face of a  
friend.



Peaceful the tranquil mountain days that  
wound  
Into weeks, like an untroubled stream, nor  
saw  
The rocks that wait to wreck its happy  
course.  
The summer died ; and autumn's faded court,  
That came in crimson splendor, shivering  
left,  
Then winter's white kiss rested on the  
hills,  
Until they felt the warmer lips of spring.  
And as the year began its fresh young  
life,  
Came the fruition of a hope, a great  
New joy to Ruth ; a great strange pride to  
John ;  
And over all the smiling hills was known  
No prouder father and no happier wife,  
No more important patriarch o'er the  
hills,





No wiser grandame through the valleys  
found,  
Than John and Ruth and the old sire and  
dame,  
When friend and kinsman gathered once  
again  
To give their welcome to the new-born son.  
All through the blossoming Spring, day after  
day,  
Ruth sat before the cottage, with her babe,  
Her eyes now on her needle, now upon  
A moving speck far down the hillside, that  
She knew was John. And sometimes, los-  
ing him  
In the blue ether of the fields below,  
The girl would stand, shading her love-sweet  
eyes,  
To follow surer where her thoughts had led.  
Then finding him, would hold her baby up  
High in her arms, as some brave soldier  
might



Uplift the standard of his fealty,  
For friend to recognize ; and loyal John,  
Down in the valley fields, would look and see  
Saluting heartily the living sign.  
Then Ruth would drink the nectar in the  
    air,  
That flooded all the April-haunted crests ;  
And worship in her simple woman's soul,  
The wondrous, sacred beauty of the hills ;  
And feel her spirit lifted up to meet  
Their ancient mystery ; yet all the while  
Resting her heart upon its own repose.

Within the cot the old man sat and read,  
And the old mother's ceaseless needles shone,  
As the gray worsted took a shape and grew.  
Then when the self-assertive clock began  
To reach its longer hours, sweet Ruth would  
    leave  
Her vigil at the door and place her boy  
Upon the sheepskin at the old folks' feet.



There he would look as wise as wisdom's self,  
Receiving with all due complacence then  
The wonder and the pride they both bestowed

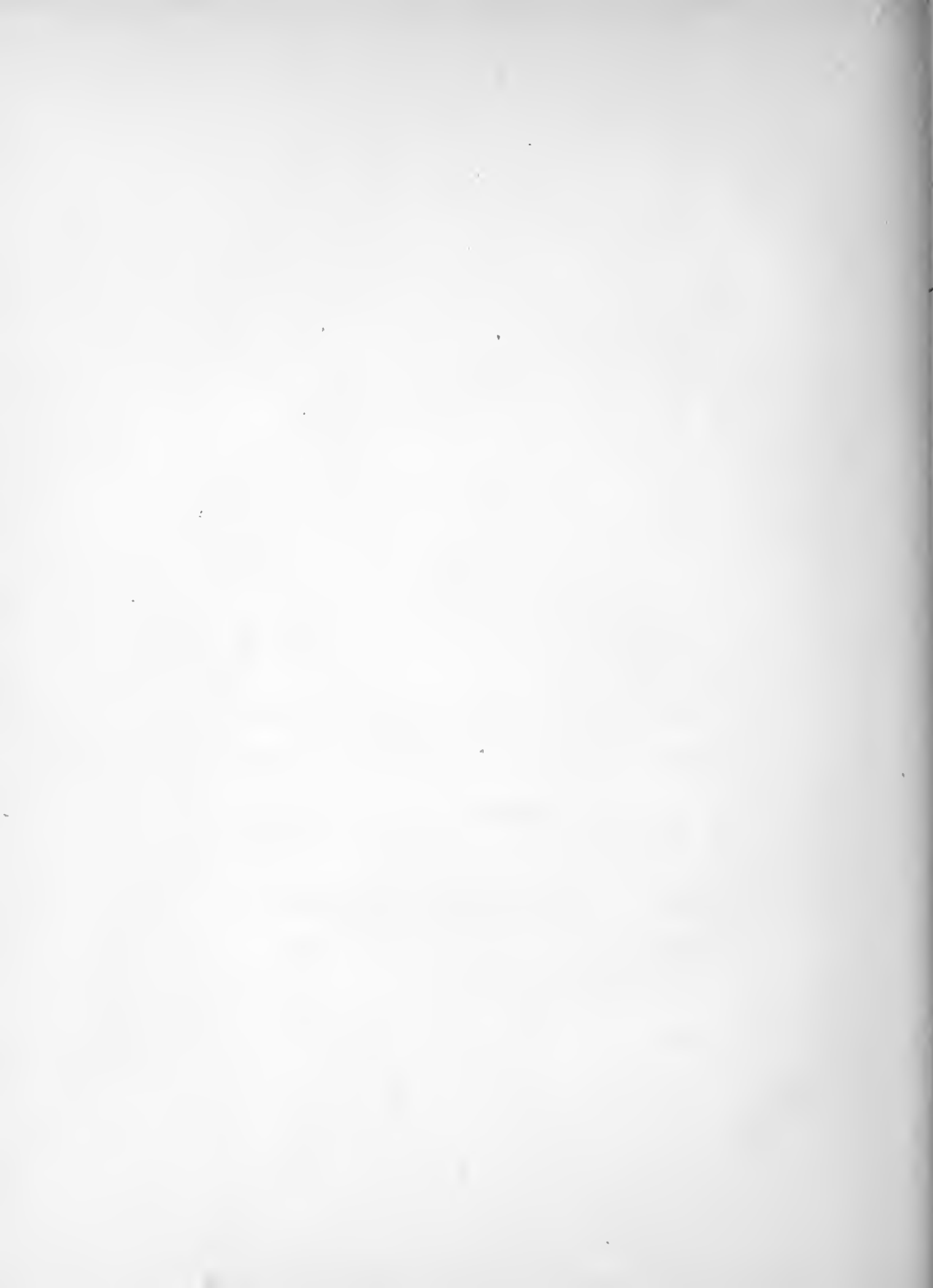
So artlessly upon him ; willing, too,  
To share approvingly their faith, that he  
Was marvellous beyond all babyhood.  
While Ruth's light step went on in busy  
way,

Speeding the simple noonday cheer for him  
Who climbed the mountain track, his heart  
aglow

With thoughts that ran like heralds of the  
feast

That waited him in Ruth's dear greeting and  
His baby's kiss.

So sped their happy days.  
So speeds the wild bird's flight, with urgent  
wing ;  
Nor sees the coming shot that soon will  
lower



Its aerial life ; and wounded, leave its hours  
Of ether, panting moments in the dust.

## II.

Slowly, but with a saddened certitude,  
Into Ruth's simple mind the knowledge grew  
That John was bearing all alone some weight  
Of painful doubt, some burden deemed too  
great

For her ; and Brutus' Portia never strove  
With gentler patience to unlock his lips ;  
More lovingly rebelled 'gainst the unfair,  
Unequal bond that gave her no due part  
Of wifely sympathy in every need.

All through the later summer days and  
through

The briefer autumn light, John labored on,  
Heaping the ripened corn that amber shone  
About his barn ; heaping the mellow hay,  
Upon whose spicy waves the summer's heart





Throbb'd out : sheafing the royal, sun-rich  
wheat

Into pale golden promises of bread ;  
A kingly largesse, meant to conquer want :  
Labored and strove as if the hunger fiend  
Pursued him, or the tyrant greed had bound  
Him to a ceaseless servitude. And Ruth,  
Keeping sad wonder from her lips, would  
seek

The meaning of the toil that robbed his days  
Of peace, devouring all his restful sleep  
With sodden weariness. Her hands would  
ask,

In loving touches and each mute caress  
Was eloquent with tender inquiry.  
At last the grain was harvested, and heap  
On heap the sheaves were gildèd, mailèd  
hosts

Armed for a victory, 'gainst winter's dearth.  
Then when the fields no longer claimed his  
care,



John made swift journeys to the county  
town ;

But left within it none of all the weight  
That burdened him. And when Ruth  
watched at eve,

The twilight mountains, all their magic  
failed,

To see him come, so weary, brow-bent, home.  
Long through the night, when wonder ban-  
ished sleep,

She heard the old man's voice, as he and  
John

Balanced some weighty question. Once she  
heard

John's eager voice, in sad decision rise :

"O father ! I must go ! for you, yourself,

Would not forbid me," and a sigh was all

The old man's answer. Through the hours  
that cry

Deadened, in Ruth's sad sense, all other  
sound,



“O father ! I must go !” “Whither ?” she  
asked,

The terror that could only tell her, John  
And she must part.

And yet the answer came.  
Too soon ; yet still it came. One ashen eve  
That shut the autumn light from view, John  
rode

Brow lower bent and drooped with heavy  
thought,

The stalwart form upon the sober steed,  
That took his master's mood. John slowly  
rode

Back from the valley town, where law and  
news

Were equally distributed ; rode up  
The russet mountain track, now musical  
With crisp brown leaves. And never seemed  
his home,

Such heart's repose, as in the fading light,  
The little cottage smiled in white relief



Against the purple, evening-shadowed crests.  
The mountaineer's strong heart, with yearning faint,

Noting the sweet, familiar form that stood  
Upon the threshold waiting him ; and to  
His wistful gaze, a guardian presence seemed  
That should have shielded that white home  
from harm.

Silent, he took their baby from her arms ;  
And led her to the cottage ; silent, stern,  
The strong heart seeking for its stolen  
strength,

Before it trusted treacherous speech. Beside  
The fire, the old man and his mother sat,—  
And borrowed from its glow the warmer  
life

That left their veins with youth.

John speechless stood  
Before them, holding still the babe, as if  
Somehow it helped him in this saddest strait  
To look upon his boy, remembering,





He now must pledge the answer that the  
years

Would ask him in the manhood of his son.  
The deep lines on his face, without a word,  
Answered the old man's sadly seeking glance.  
The mother's needles ceased their industry ;  
The age-unsteadied hands folded at rest,  
Prefacing resignation's need. Ruth crept  
Closer to John ; and pressed an earnest hand  
Upon his arm, sending him in the touch,  
Her full heart's meed of wifely sympathy.  
Was that her John speaking in that new,  
tense,  
Self-trampled voice ?

“ Father ! Mother ! Ruth !

My baby boy ! We are so happy in  
Our little home. The great hills, towering  
stand

About us like strong sentinels, to guard  
The lives beneath their solemn shade. So far,  
So high in heaven's smile, our quiet home.



That all the clamors of the noisy world  
Are only breathless whispers, when they  
climb

Our peaceful altitudes. There sometimes  
comes

A summons, in the whisper, faintly clear,  
That no man's soul can shrink from answer-  
ing.

However far away, however faint,  
The echo of that call, it must be heard—  
And it has come to me. Virginia calls  
Aloud to all her manhood, and shall I,  
Child of her brave old hills, not heed her  
voice?

True, I am far away; and none would  
seek

A simple farmer in his sky-pitched home  
In these defiant hills. But can I hear  
My Mother-State, in silence, when she cries  
In all her need, to all her sons? No! No!  
What answer give the future of my boy



When his young manhood asks : ' And where  
were you,  
My father, when our country called ; and all  
Virginia's sons responded ? ' O my wife !  
Our little year has been so plentiful  
In happiness, so soon to close ; but, Ruth,  
You would not bid me linger to prolong  
The happiness that might grow bitter to  
The coward consciousness."

Ruth sought to speak ;  
But the strong pain rose up and slew her  
voice.

" Father ! Mother ! My boyhood's proudest  
dream

To reach the day, when all my fresh, young  
strength

Could take your burdens, only leaving you,  
A peaceful sense of life's secure decline,

Is broken with the later dreams for Ruth

And for my boy. Why say I more ? The  
sharp,



Clear sound of battle rings through all our  
land ;

And every true man's arm is lifted now,  
To guard our Southland ; and shall I remain,  
In faint security, with craven heart,  
Barter for base-browed ease, the lifted front  
Of manhood, in the peril of our peace ?

Two voices called, my country and my home.  
O Ruth ! my wife ! but Him, Who made us,  
knows

The struggle sore to tell which voice to heed.  
For the strong arm I meant to be your shield,  
Could not be nerveless, in Virginia's need ;  
And that it might not blindly, traitor prove  
To either cause, my country or my hearth,  
I multiplied its strength, for many a day,  
In your behalf, to fortify our home  
Against the season, I must dedicate  
Unto my country. So the long, dark days  
Are shielded all from want. Then, while I  
give





My arm in battle for our brave old land,  
No thought of any dear one needing it,  
Shall steal its strength. And now, my home  
secure,

I listen to the other voice that called  
Against my hearthstone, and in answer,—  
go.”

Ruth’s voice that died in her first terror,  
rose

To meet John’s troubled gaze, that spite of  
all

His courage-covered words, sought her reply,  
To give them life. As though his eyes  
asked : “ Must

I go ? ” her tones rode over sobs to say :  
“ I cannot bid you stay.” The father laid  
A feeble hand that met the mother’s touch  
In silent blessing on the bended head ;  
And all the long contested doubts were done.

Now came the busy, thoughtful care of all,



The soldier's needs ; and Ruth bowed low  
Unto the shadow weighing down her heart,  
And took her part in brave activity.  
Oh that to-morrow ! when he would be gone.  
Oh those to-morrows ! when he came no  
more.

They crowded round, like dread and ghostly  
forms,

To chill her purpose and her courage slay.  
O trembling hands ! that steady seek to  
grow,

In loving last remembrances. O love !  
So fearful to behold yourself in truth,  
As one might dread the mirror, when disease  
Had blotted recognition out. O night !  
Whose long dark hours, so heavy-hearted,  
crushed

Out sleep, outweighing rest, you bring at  
length,

The morning, mocking with its heartless  
smile,







“HE SADLY KNELT ; AND LIKE AN ANCIENT HIGH PRIEST, OFFERED UP HIS SACRIFICE.”  
(See page 25 )

The farewell, falling on the little home,  
The doom of all its joys.

A thousand dawns  
Seemed coming o'er the crests, when day  
began ;  
And through the autumn glory of the hills,  
And o'er the path that led a golden way  
To the bright valley, John rode slowly down  
And went to battle.

Half way down the hill,  
He paused, a backward glance bringing again  
The dear home to his heart, he sadly knelt ;  
And like an ancient High Priest, offered up  
His sacrifice ; not tithe, but best and all,  
The treasury of simple life and love.

O God ! Who made us, Thou canst rate  
Our shallow strength and sorrow's  
might ;  
For Thou, our Father, Thou art great ;  
And we are helpless in Thy sight.





We lift the fainting will to Thee  
That falls beneath life's dread alarms ;  
Thy strength must shelter it and we  
Rest in Thy mercy's mighty arms.

My little home ! it is so small  
A spot upon Thy great world's breast,  
That eyes less tender would not fall  
Upon it ; Thine on it shall rest.

O God ! when I am far away  
In battle, in Thy guardian sight,  
I leave my home ; there let it stay,  
Safe in Thy mercy and Thy might.

All through the empty hours, day by day,  
Ruth sought beyond the ethered distance  
some  
Reprieve from that dull death, that seemed  
to cling  
About her, deadening every sense ; and all



The autumn heights a desolation made.  
How fare the days whose weight o'erpress  
our strength ?  
How speed they, when our fainting lives  
refuse  
To give them motion ? 'Tis an impetus,  
Beyond, above our power, impels the  
hours,  
Too sorrow-laden, to be borne alone ;  
And in divinely secret way, they slip  
Into the great, devouring past ; for when  
The soul is sick with anguish, blankness  
comes  
Like merciful unconsciousness to pain.  
And so Ruth's days took their own time and  
passed ;  
While all her household claims were vaguely  
heard  
And answered ; as the sick man takes his  
draught,  
Accepting it as portion of his dream.



When its hope is dead  
And its lustre fled,  
The heart has a memoried, ghostly crown ;  
For the sky will hold  
The sunset gold,  
When the golden sun has drifted down.

When music that filled  
Life's sunshine is stilled,  
A shadowy tone through the night will  
ring ;  
When the song is dumb,  
And silences come  
The unforgetting echoes will sing.

Yea ! it passes by ;  
But it cannot die,  
The soul of joy's refulgent rays :  
No sky so dark  
But keeps a spark  
Of splendor from sun-haloed days.



Ah ! doubly blest  
The joys that rest  
In benediction on our ways ;  
For the gleams they give  
Shall oft relive  
To haunt and hallow darker days.

## III.

With brief delay, within the valley town,  
To learn the seat of action, John rode on.  
He saw his native hills, like turrets, lean  
Against the purple ramparts of the sky.  
The autumn air had left its keenest blade  
Upon the heights of home ; and now the faint  
Breath of the lowlands greeted him. The  
fields,  
Fearless of earlier mountain frosts, were yet  
Unharvested. The corn no longer climbed  
In varied, ripening circles round the crests ;  
But spread a level feast unto the far





Horizon, undulated only when  
The tasselled plains bowed stiffly to the  
wind.

The mimic canvas city of the camp  
Was all alive with martial, morning stir,  
When on his sober steed, John Gildart came.  
The smile begun at his unmartial air,  
And weary self and steed vanished at sight  
Of the set soldier look upon his face.  
And later, when he stood equipped, in all  
His mountain manhood, not a voice was  
heard  
To question that a brave man came to  
war.

“Your name?” the Captain said, as brief  
as though  
Words were to him as bread in famine time.  
“John Gildart, sir.”

“Your home?” and when he named  
The hidden hamlet far behind the hills,



The Captain smiled, forgetting, too, the  
need

Of saving language, asked :

“How did you know,  
In that remote retreat, there was a war?”

“I heard it on a Court-Day in the town,  
And straightway thought a war must be  
the call

For every true man’s arm ; however far  
He may be from its face ; and if my home  
Was too remote for war to find me, I  
Could find the war ; and, Captain—I am  
here.”

The Captain paused his pen, about to place  
John Gildart in the ranks. One rapid  
glance

Went searching o’er the mountaineer’s tall  
form.

“You may be color-bearer. Sergeant, see  
To it.” A brief review, but still he kept  
John’s simple heroism in his mind,



Against the trying days of blood. They  
came.

In every desperate charge, unshuddering,  
John Gildart and his flag were at the front.  
So once, they told, when bullet-pierced, his  
leg

Hung lifeless down, he caught a musket up,  
From a dead comrade, on it, staff-like, leaned  
And flung his fearless flag.

And when they said,  
Those solemn surgeons in the hospital,  
The color-bearer's marching days were o'er,  
They reckoned not the day, when next they  
marched,

John Gildart and his flag still led the front ;  
The color-bearer's step a little halt,  
But not one halt in his high-beating heart.

Thus nigh a year, busy with blood, had  
passed,  
Yet not a message came to him from Ruth,



No echo from the home so far behind  
The azure-distanced hills. Her thought be-  
came  
The clinging comrade of his waking hours,  
The centre of his dreams. Still patient,  
hoped ;  
Remembering the well-filled barn ; nor  
dreamed  
Of danger possible, after the hours  
He filled with loving toil, forearming her,  
He surely thought, against all coming harm.  
No neighbor came from that sequestered spot,  
And to the simple dweller of the hills  
The wingèd mail was all a mystery.  
And yet, his heart cried out, in breathing  
space  
Of battles, for a word from Ruth ; but then,  
He hushed it with the hope of that near day,  
When battles done, and new peace sweeter  
grown,  
In lurid light of unforgotten strife.





O tender blindness ! that our vision veils  
And sightless, smites the future searching  
eyes.

O hope ! forecasting in a golden guise,  
The days beyond, we cannot call our own.

The year had almost wound its circle when,  
One autumn eve, John sat before his tent,  
In the short silence of the frenzied field.  
Beyond him stretched the recent battle-  
ground,

With all its dead unburied. Here and there,  
The cannon stood, like iron memories  
Of that dread day's fatality. And John,  
Turning his carnage-sickened thoughts, from  
all

War's thronging horrors, let them rest on  
Ruth.

"My wife ! Thank God ! so far away and  
safe

In that dear home that seems like Paradise,



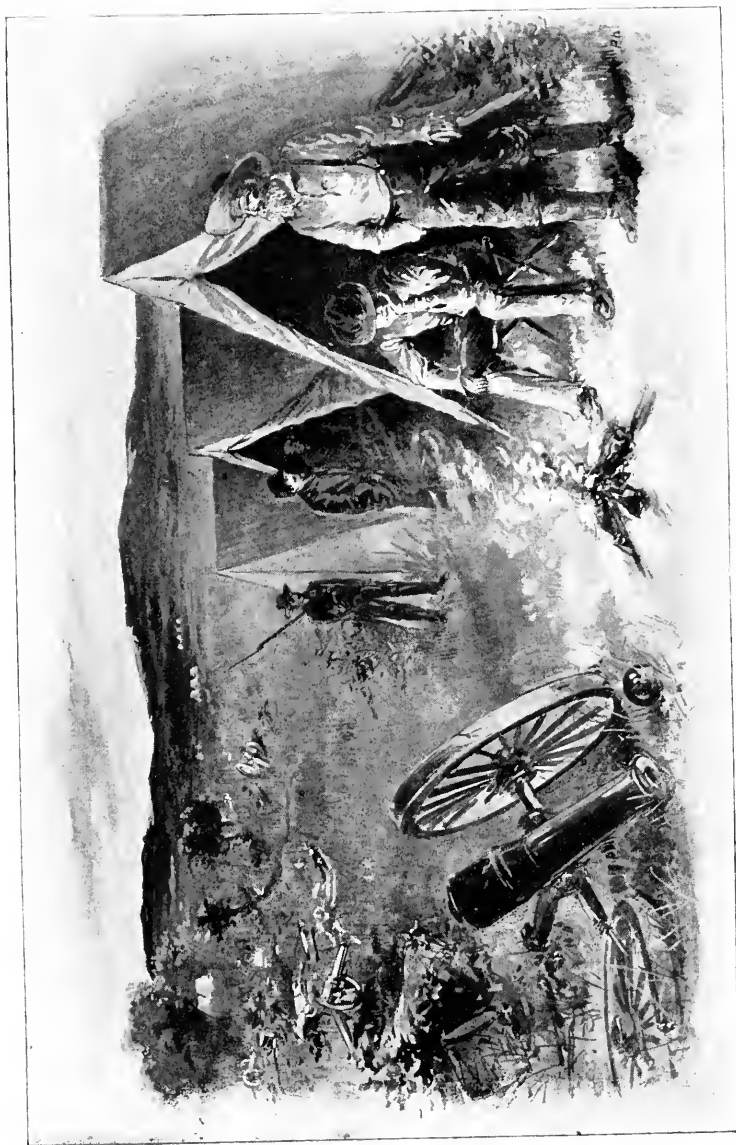
After a day like this. I never look  
On battles but I think of Ruth and say :  
Thank God ! she is so far away and safe ! ”

Just then a shadow fell across the light,  
Grown feeble in the dying of the day.  
With glad surprise, John saw the face  
Of his next neighbor in his mountain home ;  
As though his yearning thought had con-  
jured up,  
Like incantation, forms familiar to  
That dear and distant spot. Then scarce  
could John  
Give greeting to his neighbor, till he sought  
Tidings of Ruth.

“ And Ruth, my wife, is well  
And happy and the little home is safe ? ”  
The neighbor’s voice was stayed as though  
it felt  
The wound it gave. “ She’s had sore trouble  
since







"JOHN SAT BEFORE HIS TENT, IN THE SHORT SILENCE OF THE FRENZIED FIELD."  
(See page 34)

You left us, John." The color-bearer  
blanched.

Trouble to Ruth ! after he strove so long  
Forearming her. Never, by battle shock,  
Was John's strong heart so shaken as it now  
Sank at his neighbor's words. His pleading  
look

Asked for the more, his voice refused to  
seek.

"The old folks," said the mountaineer, and  
paused

Before the blow, "'tis better quickly told,  
They died two months ago ; but one short  
week

Between their going. Then the barn was  
burned.

Nothing was left of all your harvesting,  
The winter was a hard one even for  
The farmer well provided. Ruth kept on  
With silent courage that right well might  
shame





Many a sturdy man. Your little one  
Grew strong and bright, as though it almost  
throve  
On misery ; and Ruth kept bravely on.  
But your girl's heart was stronger than the  
frame  
That held it." Here John's painful breath-  
ing came  
In gasps of agony. Both hands besought  
A speedy close to anguish of suspense.  
"And she is ill, so ill the women drove  
Me down the hills to find and tell you, John.  
The neighbors came to aid Ruth ; but the  
miles  
Between them make their kindly care but  
brief ;  
And hunger, want and death are at your  
door."

Frenzied with one compelling purpose, John  
Broke from his neighbor's side to find the tent



Of his commanding officer. The guard,  
Barring his entrance to the General,  
Gave stern rebuke for breaking on the rest  
The leader sought after that trying day.  
“What matters his permission?” thought  
    poor John.  
“He would not grudge me one short visit  
    home,  
After my year of fighting; and he would  
Not—no—he could not—bid me stay, when  
    Ruth,  
My wife, so needs me; and—I cannot wait.  
I came unsought, willing and glad to come.  
But now—O God! my wife!—my Ruth!  
    how can  
I stay? And when he knows how great her  
    need,  
He will not blame me—but I cannot wait.”

And so the watching stars, that night, beheld  
The eager color-bearer and his friend,



As far they left the camp, in distance lost,  
And set their faces to the nearing hills.

Upon the roll next morn the Adjutant  
Found, "missing," unexplained, beside  
John's name ;

When days passed on nor brought him back  
to camp,

Nor search discovered when or why he left,  
The paper, where the swift, condemning pen  
Had laid its fatal stroke, went on its way  
Unto the General ; and as he read,  
Thought of the thinning ranks and of the need  
Of sharp reminders to the failing hearts ;  
And scowled upon the record, where beside  
John Gildart's name, the word "Deserter"  
stood.

Better than herb or healing ever known  
In doctor's lore, the sight of John's brown  
face,



An all-subduing remedy to Ruth.  
Her eyes drew in the happy truth, her hands  
Mute witnesses of the white waste of pain,  
Sought over and again their eager proof.  
Supported in that dear security,  
Her shaken spirit sank, from all its toils,  
To slumber velvety. When potent draughts  
Of sleep had roused the stunned vitality,  
John held the strengthening hours with  
    many a tale  
Of battle and the angry days of blood.  
While Ruth would lay a chiding hand to bar  
The hasty words that forced their way, when  
    John  
Looked on his smoldering barn, the holocaust  
Of all his toilsome hope, the ashen ghost  
Of all the promises of plenty, he  
Created from his busy, thoughtful love.  
Then Ruth would lead the bruised remem-  
    brance back  
To restful fancies ; bringing him their boy,





And bidding him behold how sturdily  
The doubting baby feet would tread alone  
Their wavering steps, till John forgot all else,  
Beyond his cottage door ; almost forgot  
How bitter was the taste of trampled hope.

And now the fragrant steps of spring ascend  
From the soft valleys to the sterner heights.  
Now beats the summer's quickening pulse  
through all

The grain life of the hills ; and once again  
John Gildart spends his hours of earnest toil  
And gathers wages of the harvest gold.  
Once more the resurrected barn is filled ;  
Once more the promises of plenty guard  
His home ; and Ruth has won back health  
in those

Dear, helpful days, that brought him to her  
side.

Up from the valley came his brother's wife,  
Widowed by war and shelterless by fire,



And found a tender welcome at Ruth's  
hearth.

The last home need now vanquished, loyal  
John

Turned to that other call, that sacred seemed,  
And kissing Ruth, went to the battle's front.

O haunting face ! rest long and dwell  
In eyes that look their last on thee.  
O trust ! now taking thy farewell,  
Of all thou never more canst be.

O stately crests ! bend graciously  
Your beauty to his clinging gaze ;  
That look your homage shall not be  
Again through all your lofty days.

O brave old hills ! close round his heart ;  
And home ! rest in it tenderly ;  
Long years shall pass, ere shall depart  
Such love and loyalty from ye.



## IV.

Three brief November suns had palely set  
And when the fourth arose, John Gildart  
came

Into the camp. Many a field was fought  
And lost since last he stood in those now thin  
And shrunken ranks. The comrades he had  
known

Now coldly greeted him ; and marvelling,  
He stood before the grim old General  
While all the camp was busy questioning  
How the deserter had been found at last.  
The General looked at John, then at the page,  
Whereon the stubborn, proof-compelling  
words,

“Gildart, John, Deserter,” stood.

“And so

They brought you back !”

“I came unsought, unforced.”

The stern commander smiled, or gave the  
ghost



Of smiling. "Ah! you thought to throw  
yourself

Upon our mercy, knowing well that soon,  
Even your mountain refuges must give  
Their hidden traitors up."

"My strong, old hills  
Are not the haunts of traitors; and their  
heights

Are brave men's homes," and in John's  
face

The quick, defending blood uprose. "I am  
No traitor. If I left the war, no call  
On earth, save one could make me leave—  
my wife.

I swore to stand between her and all harm,  
As long as life. A thousand men were at  
Your call; but I alone to hear her cry  
Across the hills; and could I stay, when she,  
My wife, ill and alone, so needed me?"  
But plead as honestly, as earnestly  
As only honest, earnest John could plead,





The dread court-martial met. And when he  
told

His simple story in his heartfelt way,  
They paused,—those solemn judges in that  
court,

Where stern death seemed presiding officer ;  
And their tribunal, gravely they adjourned,  
For dreary days, to weigh his plea against  
The heavy charge upon him, while to John  
The knowledge seemed at first impossible,  
The truth too hard to bear, that the strong  
trust

That led him, like a child, away, could mean  
Desertion and a most dishonored doom.

Ah ! would they never understand, those  
stern,

Rebuking officers, how all his months  
Of absence held the thought of his return ?  
Desertion ! when he came to war unsought.  
Desertion ! when he only crossed the hills  
To battle against death for Ruth. And so



John plead and told his heartfelt history,  
Till hopeless days began to drag all hope  
Out of the earnest spirit ; and until  
The simple story grew too pitiful,  
He almost scorned himself while telling it.  
Why should he speak of that dear home and  
Ruth

To men who made a treason of his love,  
Desertion of his loyalty ? So thus  
The color-bearer sullen grew and mute.  
The tender story was more coldly told.  
The earnest tone that spoke the faithful will  
And almost turned the rigid law of war,  
Grew passive and indifferent. Could he  
Bring forth his honest heart that judges  
might,

With iron words, to silence beat it back ?  
The waning hope that still upheld his hours  
From utter darkness, fainter grew at each  
Adjournment of the court martial ; and still  
They lifted not the heavy charge, nor loosed



The fetters that degraded him. Thus, when  
With cruel stroke it came, John's shrunken  
state

Felt not the blow that would have crushed  
him down

In his uplifted past. It fell at length—  
The heavy sentence of his doom to death.  
The merciful delays that strove to break  
The iron letter of the law were o'er ;  
And now no power of tenderness could  
bend

The rigid penalty that martial law  
Had meted out to John—a coward's fate—  
Death for desertion—and a volley fired,  
At sunset, ten days hence, straight at  
The heart that never held disloyalty.

The eve of that stern day, John Gildart  
moved

Up to his prison bars and whispered out  
To the grim sentinel : “ May I not send



Home for my wife ? ” And when permission  
came,  
Fearing to startle Ruth with cruel news,  
He bade them tell her that the fighting done,  
And he at rest, wished her to come at once  
Without delay to camp.

Ruth Gildart heard  
The summons on her heights one August  
morn ;  
And rising up she took her baby’s hand ;  
And happy, side, by side, they walked be-  
neath  
The summer hills to find the camp and John.  
Waited the color-bearer in his cell,  
For that last look, as all that held him now,  
To sight and sound of all that we call—life.

The pilgrim sun shall sail away  
Over each coming, crystal day—  
Drift down, sweet sun !  
And fade sweet sky !









“HE TOLD HIS SIMPLE STORY IN HIS HEARTFELT WAY.”

(See page 45.)

The race is run  
The goal is nigh.  
In all the ages thou shalt see,  
Forever must I be blind to thee.

The spring shall speak with timid voice,  
Till summer's richer notes rejoice,—  
Cease, tender song !  
I touch the deep  
Decline of long  
And toneless sleep.

Ah ! sweet and soft as thou canst be,  
Forever must I be deaf to thee.

When call the summer's song and sun,  
'Mid answering hearts, the silent one.  
O loving trust !  
No more reply  
The voiceless dust  
Gives thy keen cry.

How swift and strong that cry may be,  
Forever must I be dumb to thee.



## V.

Oh it was a wonderful, butterfly world !  
How rich he would be could he hold  
In the grasp of his tiny arm, unfurled,  
All the wealth of their wings of gold !

And it was a wonderful blossom world !  
Must he hurry and say good-bye  
To the laughing faces of flowers uncurled  
At his feet that over them fly ?

And oh ! what a song that robin sings !  
And oh ! how the river can run !  
How the sky outspreads its fleecy wings,  
To melt in the molten sun !

So chattered on Ruth's boy in that new world  
Beneath the hills as swift they journeyed on,  
With childhood's artless avarice, 'mid all  
The largesse of the summer bountiful.  
And happy in his happiness, Ruth stayed



Her eager feet, to watch his breathless chase  
Of butterfly and bird ; and held him near  
Her heart, when tired out of fruitless hunt.  
Then all the summer shone within her soul,  
As nearer came the welcome that they  
    sought,  
She and her boy, from that strong heart that  
    held  
Them in its tender strength. She marked  
    his grace,  
Her sturdy boy, and proud uprose the  
    thought,  
How true an heir he was to all the health,  
The great hills' heritage ; how true a son  
To him, a mountain manhood had so dowered.  
And oh, the warm, bright August in her  
    heart,  
When they should meet, John and his boy,  
    and she  
Stand in the glowing summer of their love.





They climbed, one eve, a gentle hill and  
stood

An hour before the sunset, on its crest.

“O mamma! see! the soldiers and the  
tents!”

Cried little John, with merry clapping  
hands.

Ruth sank in silent, prayerful gratitude;  
For there, down in the valley meadow just  
Beneath them was the camp. An hour be-  
fore

The sunset. In the amber light of eve,  
The white tents rose and fell in snowy  
mounds:

While all the armed ranks, by distance  
dwarfed,

Were but as dragon-flies, invisible,  
Save for their glitter. Then a bugle tone,  
The spirit of a sound that died and rose  
Again, before it perished, came to them  
An hour before the sunset.



Ruth sat down,  
Remembering the many miles she toiled ;  
And found the weariness she had not found  
In former haste. But, now, there was the  
camp  
And John ; so she would rest an hour and go  
To him, with no sign of her toilsome way  
To hang about her and to mar her joy.  
Yes ! she would rest this hour, thinking  
how long  
The twilight to the highlands clings ; its  
soul,  
Lingering and lost, among the hills of eve.  
So rested tranquilly and watched her boy,  
This hour before the setting of the sun.  
The moments glided onward, drop by drop.  
The downward sun was lessening, step by  
step,  
The distance of the day. No sound came up  
To break the heart of silence on the hill,  
Save when her boy would shout aloud to find



And follow some belated butterfly.  
Now he came sobbing to his mother's side,  
And showed her how his gaudy prize was  
crushed  
And beautiless within his conquering grasp.  
Possession's fatal blow to all the grace,  
Illusion gives to credulous desire.  
Ruth comforted her boy, and checked his  
tears,  
And kissed away their traces, bringing back  
The baby dimples, John would love to see.  
And now rose up to seek him.

As she stood,  
Choosing the gentlest path, for baby feet,  
A cannon poured its single, solemn note  
Upon the empty air ; and then she saw  
The sun pass down beyond horizon's bar.  
The light was taken prisoner by the dark ;  
And the deep voice had bidden day farewell.  
The hour had passed. It was the sunset  
gun.



But half the hill descended, Ruth stood still  
To watch a sudden movement in the camp ;  
And there beyond the tents she saw an open  
space,

Where four-and-twenty ready soldiers shone,  
Forming a single far-outstretching line  
That glittered like a silver chain.

Beyond  
The space, facing their guns, there stood  
erect

A single figure that might be a man ;—  
Ruth could not tell, in that long stretch of  
sight.

She paused to puzzle over it ;—and then—  
The sudden lifting of a shining row  
Of muskets—then a volley's rattling fire—  
That sounded almost sweet to Ruth, who  
stood

And heard its softened echo wondering.  
Then silence wavering, like a sob grown  
still.





As we pause to leave the day at eve,  
And watch it lovingly out of sight,  
A deeper day may steal away,  
And life drift down to a deeper night.

As we bid good-bye to each sunset sky,  
In our sigh unconscious tears may dwell ;  
All the crimson and gold that life can  
hold,  
May be fading away their own farewell.

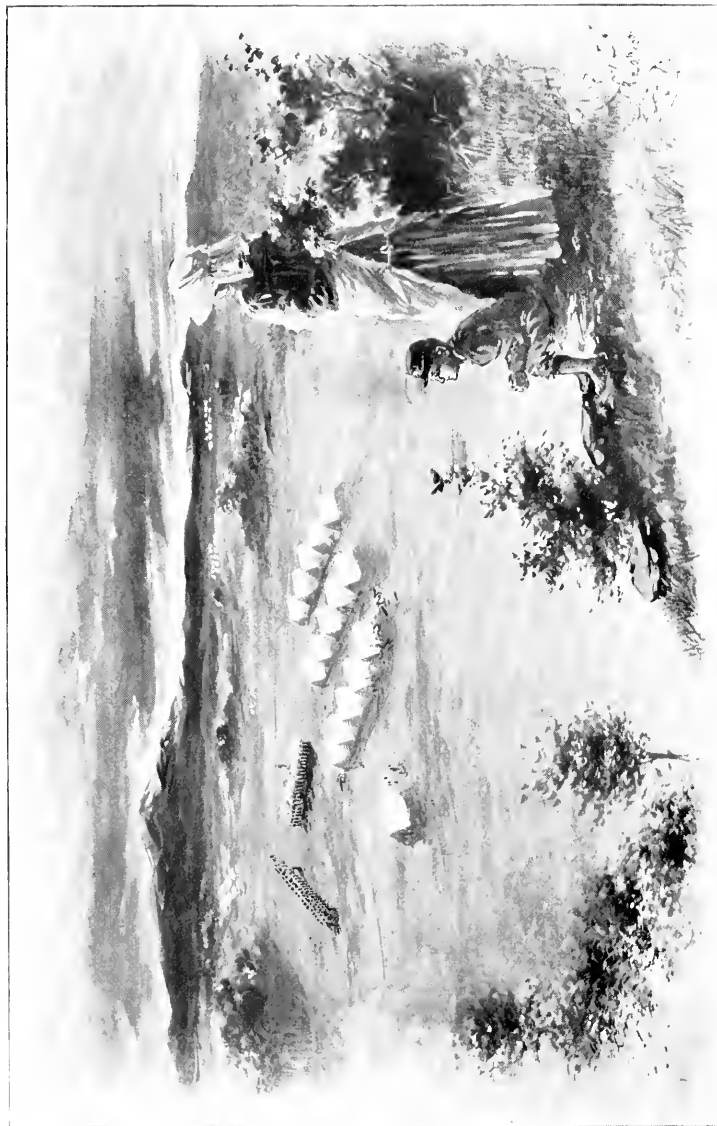
O sunset sky ! O days that die !  
Ere ever again ye lift the night,  
Beyond the brink of dawn we sink,  
Beyond the borderlands of light.

## VI.

A shadow at his door, the General  
Looked up and met an eager, searching gaze.  
A woman stood before the tent. Her dress  
Told of her mountain home, as did her high,







"THERE STOOD ERECT A SINGLE FIGURE THAT MIGHT BE A MAN."

(See page 55.)

Free grace of movement. From her face,  
The bonnet, falling back, a picture showed  
Of hope sincerest. From the grave, blue  
eyes,

The shining soul of happiness went forth  
With every glance. A little rosy boy,  
A blossom of the sunhigh hills, was at  
Her side.

“I came to seek my husband, sir.”

It might have been, “my king,” so proud  
the tone.

“What is your name?”

“Ruth Gildart, sir.”

“And his?”

No—not—

“My husband is John Gildart, sir,  
A color-bearer in your ranks. I came  
Across the hills as quickly as I could.  
They said he wanted me ; that he was free  
From fighting now.”

“Yes ! yes !” the General said ;



And whispered to his pitying soul : “ Yes !  
Free !

Forever free ! as one who hears the last  
Command ; obeys it ; while obedience  
Is death.”

“ They said that I could come to him ;  
And you, kind sir, will tell me where to find  
My husband now.” The General’s stern  
eyes

Fell from her gaze and sought the fatal  
page,  
Whereon his hand had signed John Gildart’s  
doom.

He looked at Ruth. Then started up ; and  
then sat down.

“ What did you say—John Gildart  
—why

There must be some mistake ; and are you  
sure,

Quite sure—that was—what is your hus-  
band’s name ?”





“John Gildart, sir;” the voice was very sweet ;

And sweeter still the puzzled face that turned

To answer him. Again he looked. A great, Strong pity stifled him. How could he tell This happy girl, that out beyond the camp, A still, dark soldier lay, with lifted face Sightless to the stars ? Oh God ! how could She smile and ask in that proud voice, For him ?

“Will you not tell me, sir, where I Can find John Gildart ?” But the General Shrank from the tender eyes that smote his soul.

Ruth sat and waiting his reply, she faced The officer. He brought a sterner tone To battle with the pity that well nigh Had conquered him.

“Why should you wish to see So cowardly a man, as we have proved



Your husband was ? He left the camp, with-  
out

A furlough, and on some pretext that you  
Were dying ; and it was the very eve  
Of our most fatal battle ; but he saved  
His coward's life to lose his honest name ;  
And coward and deserter now is proved."

Ruth Gildart rose. She strove in vain to  
speak ;

But the fierce pain smote voice and utterance  
dumb.

A million cruel echoes seemed to pour  
Into her hot indignant heart, the words  
The General had hurled at her. Her John  
A coward ! a deserter ! And must she  
Stand silent, in the face of calumny  
Like this ? She strove to speak. A little hand  
Tugged at her dress. Her baby's pleading  
tone :

"O mamma ! come and see ! Please, mamma,  
come !



I want to see the soldiers. Here they  
come !”

Ruth blindly followed, glad to leave the  
tent

That seemed a sinful place, since she had  
heard

The slanderous words ; and glad to breathe  
again

The sinless air.

The night was nearer now  
Than when she reached the camp.

She stood in doubt

A moment, wondering. And where was  
John ?

Only within his arms could she forgive,  
Forget that moment's cruelty. Now must  
She hasten on to seek him ere the night  
Made her search hopeless, in that tented  
town.

Tent after tent, she peered into, and sighed  
To find no face like John's. Her baby's step



Grew heavy as her heart with fruitless  
search.

“Where is my soldier papa?” ’twixt two  
sobs

The question came. “Hush! baby dear,  
for soon

We shall see papa.” Through her words of  
cheer

The undertone of disappointment came.

The rows of tents stopped here, and still  
No trace of John.

She looked beyond the camp,  
Into the open space, where she had watched  
The shining muskets, just an hour ago.  
The field was quiet now. The sound of  
arms

And tread of soldiers faded to the peace  
Of camp at twilight. Still Ruth wandered  
on.

A group, small, dark, almost indefinite,  
Stood at the meadow’s limit. To her gaze,





Their attitude of quiet waiting seemed  
To draw her near ; and as she moved, her  
steps

Were driven onward, by some impetus  
Unseen, but more than felt.

Breathless, she paused,  
Without their circle. On its edge, surprised,  
The kindly soldier faces greeted her.

A heavy silence hung upon the men,  
And almost hushed the question on her lips.  
No answer came, as Ruth looked eagerly,  
From soldier unto soldier, paling there,  
Before her question, as they had not paled,  
Before the battle's shock.

The solemn beat  
Of rugged words, the soldier-preacher's tone  
Was broken as Ruth's voice arrested him ;  
While every man started and looked aghast,  
To hear John Gildart sought for at that  
hour.

And every moistened eye instinctive fell



Upon the ready grave, its waiting guest,—  
The form that blanket-covered slept,  
Silent and veiled and nameless, while she  
spoke.

But in that shuddering pause, the waiting  
blow

That strong men could not strike, a baby  
hand

At last sent sudden down ; for little John,  
Peering about the soldiers and their arms,  
Touching with tiny fingers, swords and  
guns

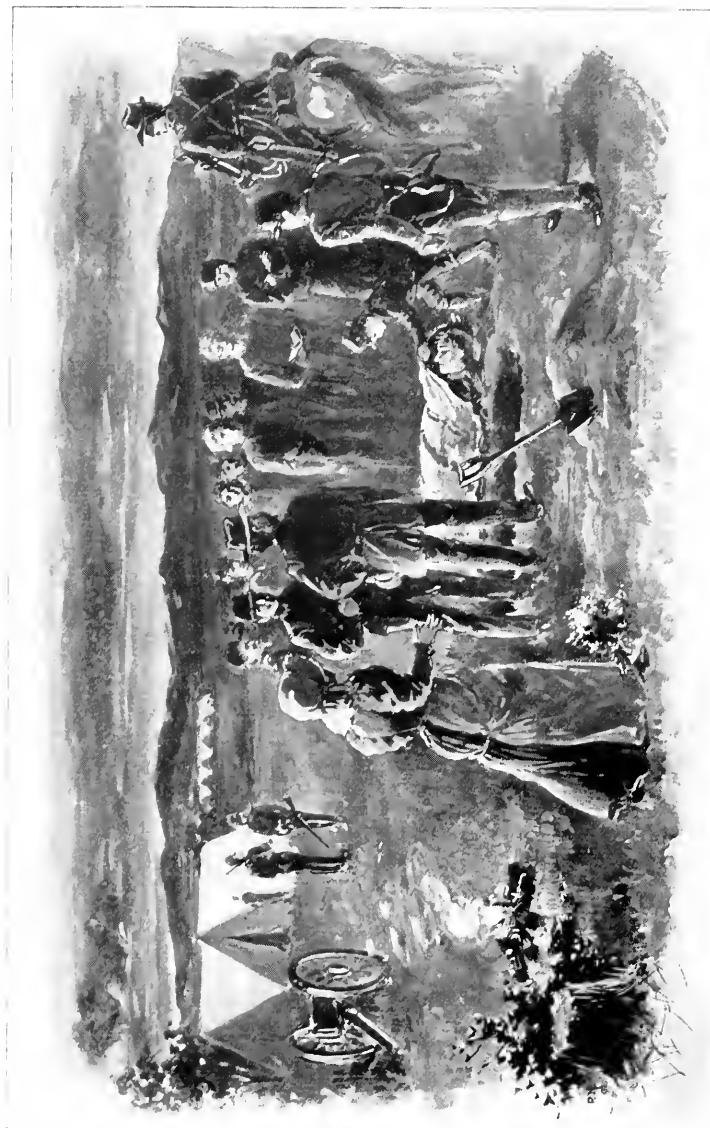
Came to the nameless burden that was laid  
Before the open grave. With playful touch  
The fearless baby fingers lifted up

The awful drapery of death. Ruth sprang  
To chide her boy ; and drawing near she saw  
The form and features of the unveiled dead.  
An instant's anguished recognition came.

Her search was ended and John Gildart  
found.







"THE FEARLESS BABY FINGERS LIFTED UP THE AWFUL DRAPERY OF DEATH."

(See page 64.)

Shriek after shriek, to shuddering echoes  
tore  
The heart of peace that beat upon the  
night ;  
And all the soul of starry silence fled.

As after autumn's storms, to woodland  
comes  
The winter's snowy hush, on Ruth's wild  
grief,  
The softness fell of white unconsciousness.  
From that deep sleep, she rose to walk beside  
The still, tall form, upon the wagon borne ;  
The stalwart color-bearer's last sad march.  
And so she brought him home across the  
hills.  
Oh ! anguish of that second " coming home "  
To Ruth, remembering the happy first.  
There rested he amid the solemn heights ;  
And there Ruth dwelt through all her wid-  
owed days.





A shadow over all the noble hills ;  
A shadow over all the little home ;  
A shadow over all her empty life.

## I.

O hills ! that held his heart, now keep  
His spirit 'mid your dauntless crests ;  
And prouder rise, while he shall sleep ;  
And statelier that here he rests.

## II.

Let not the lying shot that hushed  
His heart, a living witness be.  
O loyal hills ! the life it crushed,  
Was yours, the steadfast and the free.

## III.

And silent be the fatal word,  
By which he fell ; but tenderly,  
From crest to crest, be clearly heard  
His brave and gentle fealty.







“AND SO SHE BROUGHT HIM HOME ACROSS THE HILLS.”

(See page 65.)

IV.

Then rest ! strong heart ! in thy home  
hills :

Thy mountain mother's memory  
Claims all thy lofty life and fills  
Her unforgetting heights with thee.

FINIS.



## REUNITED.

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(Written after the Yellow Fever Epidemic of 1878.)

PURER than thy own pure snow,  
Nobler than thy mountain's height,  
Deeper than thy ocean's flow,  
Stronger than thy own proud might,  
O Northland ! to thy sister land,  
Was late thy mercy's generous deed and  
grand.

Nigh twice ten years the sword was  
sheathed ;  
Its mist of green o'er battle-plain  
For nigh two decades spring had breathed ;  
And yet the crimson life-blood stain  
From passive swords had never paled,





From fields where all were brave and some  
had failed.

Between the Northland, Bride of Snow,  
And Southland, brightest Sun's fair  
Bride,

Swept, deepening ever in its flow,

The stormy wake in war's dark tide.

No hand might clasp across the tears  
And blood and anguish of four deathless  
years.

When summer, like a rose in bloom,

Had blossomed from the bud of spring,

Oh! who could deem the dews of doom

Upon the blushing lips could cling?

Who could believe its fragrant light

Would e'er be freighted with the breath of  
blight?

Yet o'er the Southland crept the spell

That e'en from out its brightness spread,



And prostrate, powerless, she fell,  
Rachel-like, amid her dead.  
Her bravest, fairest, purest, best,  
The waiting grave would welcome as its  
guest.

The Northland, strong in love and great,  
Forgot the stormy days of strife ;  
Forgot that souls with dreams of hate  
Or unforgiveness e'er were rife.  
Forgotten was each thought and hushed,  
Save she was generous and her foe was  
crushed.

No hand might clasp from land to land !  
Yea ! there was one to bridge the tide ;  
For at the touch of Mercy's hand,  
The North and South stood side by side.  
The Bride of Snow, the Bride of Sun,  
In Charity's espousals are made one.



“Thou givest back my sons again,”  
The Southland to the Northland cries.  
“For all my dead, on battle-plain,  
Thou biddest my dying now uprise.  
I still my sobs, I cease my tears,  
For thou hast recompensed the anguished  
years.”

Blessings on thy every wave !  
Blessings on thy every shore !  
Blessings that from sorrows save !  
Blessings giving more and more !  
For all thou gavest thy sister land,  
O Northland ! in thy generous deed and  
grand !



## ST. PATRICK'S BEACON FIRE.

---

THE ship by Innis Phadruig stands, the Isle  
That Patrick's name has hallowed since the  
Saint

Trod as a benediction on its sands.

Then many an isle and little port and bay,  
The Saint's ship touched, till where the bend-  
ing Boyne

Bows till abased, self-lost, within the sea.

They tarry. Forty days the watching crew,  
With fast and prayer, held the golden hours.

O vernal promise ! mingling with the tide

Of Patrick's gospel, filling all the land,

As sun and song and blossom fill the spring.

On Tara's Height, a glory yet ungleamed,

This Resurrection Morn. The mystic fire

That fed the Druids' faith, by Loagare's tent





ST. PATRICK'S BEACON FIRE. 73

Shall have another mystery. Eternal steps  
Are on thy hills, O Erne ! to-day.

Thy Saint, thy Message comes ; and never-  
more

Shall fade the flower springing on his track,  
The Flower of Faith, his Erin wears as full,  
As fragrant still, as when it leaped up free,  
On green Magh-Breagh, that Easter memor-  
able,

In that bright year, Loagare was King and  
held

O'Nial's throne, his grandsire famed in song  
Of bards, " O'Nial of the Nine Hostages."

The Court at Tara met. The sacred fire,  
The sovereign's sole right was blazing forth,  
The royal flame, proclaiming far and near,  
The Council of the Nobles and the King.

And instant death was his who durst to light  
A beacon fire, in sight of Tara's Hill,  
While burned the royal blaze and Council  
met.



“But see!” the Druids cry unto the King,  
 “Yon fire of sacrilege.” Upon the banks  
 Of Boyne, a tent. Before its open door  
 The daring light of beacon fire forbid  
 The limits of the Land of Breagh.

“A sign!  
 O King!” the Druids wail, “a fateful sign!  
 Bid yonder blaze be instant quenched. What

say  
 The prophecies? A deadly and dark word  
 For thee, Loagare. ‘When burns a blaze  
 before

The beacon of the King, the hand that held  
 The daring torch shall hold thy land as well.  
 And never, age on age, shall pass away,  
 The power of him whose beacon burns be-  
 fore

The beacon of the King.’ Forevermore!”  
 The Druids wail, “unless he instant die,  
 Shall he be sovereign of our land of Erne;  
 And never other King, the Erseland own.”



So King Loagare bade hasty messengers  
Summon the builder of the impious fire  
Before the Court and Council of the Druids.

“Let none arise !” the monarch gave command,  
As all the Court impelled to reverence,  
Moved at the coming of the gentle Saint.  
Close after him, in loving humbleness,  
A noble convert followed, Sessnen's son,  
Benignus, young and eager in new faith,  
Leaving the heirdom of all Meath, to join  
His steps with Milcho's stranger slave.

But Erc,  
The tall, strong son of Dego, rose upstraight  
And bowed in Patrick's sight ; the impetus  
Within, impelling stronger than the word  
Of King Loagare, forbidding reverence.

Then all forgotten was the daring fire  
Of sacrilege, as Court and King and Queen,



ST. PATRICK'S BEACON FIRE. 76

Druid and Bard and Warrior owned the spell  
Of that strange Message, captives to the  
faith.

Dubtach, the master soul of song, the bard  
By King Loagare, the best beloved, swift  
taught

His Druid harp, the melody of Christ.  
And never fell, in battle, fierce and fast,  
The vanquished from the Irish swords, as  
fell

The ancient creed of Erne, at Patrick's word.  
Just as the land, the dear and green sweet  
land

He loved, laid off the winter's snow, at touch  
Of spring's first smiling, finding emerald  
garb

And richest gems beneath, so fell from  
Erne,

As swift away, the Druids and their day.  
So melted fast into the warm, true light  
Of Christ's own love, the little Isle of Saints.





O that first Easter Morn on Tara's Hill !  
O springtime ! in that ancient shamrock  
land.

We tread the centuries to meet again.  
We bring the picture back to loyal faith—  
The Court of King Loagare, on Magh-  
Breagh's plain—

The witchery of spring—the song of thrush—  
In hawthorne hedge or hid in ivy wall—  
We fill the picture of that Easter Morn—  
And Patrick coming with the fair, young day.

But lo ! a stronger voice comes thrusting  
through

The widening waste of ages—stronger still,  
The voice of prophecy. O wailing priests  
Of Baal ! the fire of Druid faith has paled  
Before the greater light in Patrick's hand.  
Still may your wail grow into prophecy  
Fulfilled ; and Patrick's daring fire before  
The beacon of the Council of Loagare,



ST. PATRICK'S BEACON FIRE. 78

Proclaim another Everlasting King,  
Our Erin's only monarch ; and His reign  
Shall never perish ; for our land of Erne  
Is Christ's own kingdom, won that Easter  
Morn,  
For faith eternal, by her deathless Saint.





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